

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L USUN 3908

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: UNGA, PDEV, FJ

SUBJECT: SELFDETERMINATION -- THE BANABANS OF FIJI

1. PERM REP VUNIBOBO OF FIJI TALKED WITH AMB BENNETT AFTERNOON SEPTEMBER 23 TO ASK US VIEWS ON PROBLEM INVOLVING BANABAN COMMUNITY OF FIJI WHO HAVE CLAIMS TO TERRITORY IN GILBERT AND ELLICE ISLANDS (SIC) AND WISH TO SEND DELEGATION TO MAKE CASE BEFORE UNGA COMMITTEE.

2. ACCORDING VUNIBOBO'S PRESENTATION, BANABANS WERE ORIGINALLY INHABITANTS OF OCEAN ISLANDS ONE OF THE GILBERT AND ELLICE ISLANDS. IN CONNECTION WITH EXPLOITATION OF PHOSPHATE DEPOSITS ON OCEAN ISLAND, BANABANS -- WHO ARE ETHNICALLY CLOSE TO INHABITANTS OF MARSHALL ISLANDS OF TTPI -- WERE TRANSFERRED TOWARDS END OF WW II TO RABI ISLAND, ONE OF FIJIAN GROUP, WHICH WAS PURCHASED FOR THEM BY THE UK. IN THE INTERVENING TIME THEY HAVE BECOME FIJIAN CITIZENS, BUT THEY ARE NOW ASSERTING THEIR CLAIMS WITH RESPECT TO OCEAN ISLAND. THAT MATTER IS NOW IN THE HIGH COURT IN LONDON.

3. BANABANS WISH TO DETACH OCEAN ISLAND FROM GILBERT AND ELLICE AND HAVE IT GIVEN INDEPENDENCE HAVING ASSOCIATE
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STATUS WITH FIJI. THEY WISH TO COME TO NEW YORK TO PRESENT

THEIR CASE BEFORE ONE OF THE POLITICAL COMMITTEES OF THE UNGA. FIJIAN GOVERNMENT IS ATTEMPTING, SO FAR WITHOUT SUCCESS, TO DISSUADE BANABANS FROM MAKING THE TRIP. AMONG OTHER THINGS, VUNIBOBO SAID, GOF BELIEVES AFRICAN MEMBERS AND OTHERS WOULD NOT WISH TO SUPPORT THIS BANABAN INITIATIVE. VUNIBOBO COMMENTED THAT THIS TAKES SELFDETERMINATION BEYOND EVEN WHAT MOST AFRICANS SUPPORT.

4. VUNIBOBO SAW ANALOGIES IN SITUATION TO ISLAND TERRITORIES HAVING RELATIONSHIP TO US, NOTABLY TTPI AND PUERTO RICO. HE SAID HE WOULD APPRECIATE KNOWING US POSITION ON AN APPEARANCE AT UN BY BANABAN REPRESENTATIVES. WHAT ATTITUDE WOULD US DEL TAKE IF BANABANS INSISTED ON COMING TO NEW YORK? BENNETT PROMISED TO INQUIRE OF WASHINGTON AND TO GIVE VUNIBOBO AN ANSWER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

5. COMMENT: THIS STRIKES US AS AN EXOTIC PEOPLE WITH AN EXOTIC PROBLEM. WOULD WELCOME GUIDANCE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

BENNETT

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